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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NASSAU 000061

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR WBENT AND INR/B

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAIR](#) [BF](#)

SUBJECT: PM PREDICTS PLP ELECTION WIN, LAMENTS AIRPORT PROBLEMS AND DISCUSSES HIS STROKE

REF: A. 05 NASSAU 1952

[1](#)B. NASSAU 58

Classified By: CDA D.BRENT HARDT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Perry Christie in a January 5 meeting with the Ambassador confidently predicted that his Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) would win the elections he must call no later than May 2007 unless the Government makes some big mistakes between now and then. Christie also commented on the continuing problems at Nassau International Airport, lamenting that the government had not been informed of radar problems that shut air traffic down for several days during Christmas week, and that steps to address problems had been inadequate. Christie attributed the rebound from his May 2005 stroke to his having followed doctor,s orders to rest and resume duties slowly. He now again finds himself overworked, however, and admitted he needed to restructure his office to support him more effectively. He hinted that a cabinet shuffle was in the works, and would be announced in the near future. End Summary.

Christie Predicts PLP Victory

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador called on Prime Minister Perry Christie January 5 to deliver the President,s holiday greetings and review issues on the bilateral agenda at the start of the New Year. Christie, in a relaxed and expansive mood, predicted that his Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) would win the elections he must call no later than May 2007, which are likely later this year or in early 2007. He said that the PLP,s populist roots as the party that led The Bahamas to majority rule give it a built-in advantage over the opposition Free National Movement (FNM), which had originally been the party of the predominantly white merchant class. He said the party,s base was a solid 51 percent of the electorate, barring major discontent with its actions. "Unless we mess up in a big way," Christie said, "we will win the elections." He suggested that the FNM had taken power in the 1990,s only after corruption scandals in PLP founder Sir Lynden Pindling's government had become so widespread that people became turned off.

Race and Politics

[1](#)3. (C) Following the FNM,s election of a white Deputy Leader earlier this year (Ref A) and PLP convention remarks that sought to link this choice to the FNM,s merchant class origins, the PLP had received criticism for injecting race into Bahamian politics. Christie, who broached the issue with the Ambassador, denied that race was a major issue in The Bahamas or that it would be an issue in the campaign. Outside of older Bahamians who may retain memories of past injustice, most Bahamians today, he argued, do not spend much time thinking about issues of race. Despite the differing origins of the parties, Christie said that today there were no major ideological or policy differences between the two major parties. The primary issue for the electorate, he believed, was which party could manage the country more effectively. "Obviously," he said, "I think that is us."

Airport Delays and Problems of Governing

[1](#)4. (C) Christie lamented to the Ambassador a recent failure of the radar at Nassau International Airport during Christmas week -- one of the busiest travel times of the year -- a failure that lasted nearly five days because of poor management at the airport authority and generated considerable anger from frustrated passengers. He claimed that the government had not initially been informed of the problem, and that the quasi-governmental airport authority had bungled the repair effort. He noted that an urgently needed part had been driven from Oklahoma rather than being flown directly, and that the technicians needed to install the part had not been notified in time to arrive with the part, and were ultimately left languishing at a private airport when they arrived. Christie said this case was

typical of the frustrations he encountered in trying to govern The Bahamas.

15. (C) Christie also asked the Ambassador about reports of delays at the airport arising from an alleged recommendation by the head of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Pre-Clearance Unit not to open a second security checkpoint. The Ambassador told him that on the contrary, CBP had been fully staffed at 5:00 AM and we had urged the Airport Authorities to open additional checkpoints at that time as well, but they were not operational until mid-morning until lines had built up. Telephone calls to the airport and customs confirmed our assessment of the cause of the delays. Christie and the Ambassador also reviewed proposed changes to the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) local security procedures, with the Ambassador pointing out that we would agree to a reconfiguration that would expedite travelers on the condition that a number of tighter security arrangements were put in place. The Ambassador noted that improving airport management would be vital to our ability to move forward. Christie said the government recognized that the airport needed better management, and said the long-awaited award of a management contract to a Canadian company, YVR, was nearly finalized. He was expecting a final contract from the company that day, and he hoped to announce the deal in the days ahead.

Cabinet Shuffle Likely in Election Run-Up

16. (C) Christie told the Ambassador he would be making some Cabinet changes in the months ahead to move out some poorly performing ministers and bring in some better performers. He also indicated that he would be looking to bring in some extra help to his office in the form of a chief of staff. With the political season heating up, Christie said he was being approached by so many people for political favors on top of all the issues that ended up on his plate that he was looking to hire a chief of staff to keep track of commitments and ensure follow-up. He complained that too many issues ended up on his desk because ministers were reluctant to take decisions in their area of purview. This applied to the issue of the Cuban detainees (Ref B), which he normally expects the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deal with without his becoming involved.

Rebounded from Stroke, but Taking on Too Much

17. (C) In the context of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's second stroke, Christie observed that his own stroke in May 2005 had been very similar to that suffered by Sharon. Unlike Sharon, however, he did not initially resume activity. On doctor's orders, he withdrew from major activity for three months, and only slowly returned to active public life in the subsequent three months. He noted that during that period, even though he felt fine most of the time, he would be suddenly overcome by exhaustion. Unfortunately, he had just passed through a busy political season with his party's convention in November and the year-end Junkanoo festivals, and the year ahead was likely to be even busier. He was diligently attempting to pace himself, but it was not proving easy to do so.

Comment

18. (C) Christie has clearly reemerged as a dominant political force following his stroke, and is gearing up for what he knows will be a close, hard-fought election battle with his friend and former law partner, former FNM Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham. Christie's political weakness has been a widespread popular perception of indecisiveness. Christie knows this and no doubt hopes that the awarding of an airport management contract and a reshuffle of the cabinet -- which has been rumored for two years -- will signal his willingness to bite the bullet and make tough decisions. He continues to welcome a close partnership with the United States and greatly appreciates the extensive support we provide the Bahamas through OPBAT and training of law enforcement personnel. The opposition FNM sees itself as the more friendly party toward the U.S., however, and could attempt to use the PLP's cultivation of ties with China and Cuba to make "management of relations with the U.S." a wedge issue in the coming campaign. End comment.

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